

## **A Question and Answer Session on the Meaning of Being Human, with Dr. Gholamreza Aavani**

### **Abstract:**

In this article Dr. Aavani addresses a series of questions related to the meaning of being human. In particular these questions focus on man's role as vicegerent of God, the special dignity he holds as a result of this position, the difference between this dignity and human rights, the obligations that arise from this dignity, the impediments to its realization, and the scriptural foundations of this perspective. In his answers to these questions Dr. Aavani gives a summary of Islamic sacred anthropology, basing his explanations firmly in the tradition of Islamic wisdom and the Quran and Hadith themselves, quoting the Quran at length to elucidate his answers.

Key Terms: human, dignity, human rights, vicegerent, epiphany

### **Question 1- What does it mean to be human?**

Before answering this question it should be noted that when we want to answer a question in a religious context, or for that matter in any context whatsoever, we should see that problem in its totality and not take it as a partial aspect sundered from its wholeness. This is especially true when we are considering religion, which is related to

and concerned with a total revelation, which by etymology and definition is the self-revealing of God Himself on the cosmic and the human plane. Hence metaphysically speaking we are not permitted to abstract God and the cosmos from our discussions of man in a religious context. Or more succinctly, we should not see man outside this totality which is religion.

Secondly, in talking about man within a religious context in general we should make a clear-cut distinction between the first and the second, or physical and spiritual, birth of man. No religion is oblivious of the second birth; otherwise religion would be reduced to physiological anthropology and scriptures to the manuals of Darwinian biology. While in all religions stress is laid on the second birth, the emphasis on the first birth varies from almost total abnegation to a reasonable compromise.

Most of the respectable philosophical dictionaries and encyclopedias in English shy away from including «man» in their entries. Standard dictionaries, apart from such lexical clarifications as «belonging to the human species», give the following definition: "a bipedal primate mammal that is anatomically related to the great apes but distinguished by notable development in the brain with a resultant capacity for articulate speech and abstract reasoning, marked erectness of body carriage with corresponding alteration of muscular balance and loss of prehensile powers of the foot and shortening of the arm with accompanying increase in thumb size and opposability that is usually considered to occur in a variable number of freely interbreeding races and that is the sole recent representative of the natural family Hominidae». (See Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, 1983)

It is evident that such definitions are concerned with the first or biological birth of man envisaged from a Darwinian perspective and would not help us with regard to the issue of the dignity of man. Recourse should be taken instead to the conception of man as delineated in the three Abrahamic religions, with special emphasis on Islam.

Abrahamic religions, it should be said, have this among many other things in common, that their God is manifestly personal, in

addition to having an impersonal aspect, and moreover the founders of the three religions are historical figures. In the Eastern religions on the contrary, more emphasis is laid on the impersonal or the so-called *nirguna*<sup>1</sup> aspect of the Divinity, rather than on the personal or the *saguna*<sup>2</sup> aspect. Moreover, the founders of religions there are ahistorical or rather trans-historical figures. This goes to explain why the personal aspect of the Divinity and its encounter with man is more in focus in Abrahamic religions and again why the conception of man as a person is intimately associated with that of a personal Divinity. Having this in mind we cast a cursory glance on certain features of the human being (male or female) which constitute his or her humanity and which are significant with respect to human dignity.

### **Man, the Bearer of the Divine Spirit**

a- Man, according to the Holy Quran bears within himself the Divine Spirit. As in the Bible it is said of God that «I blew into him of my own spirit »

(و نفخت فيه من روحي). The question is: who has more claim to this spirit? the «blower» or the «blown into». The answer depends upon whether one affirms or denies one's illusory self or one's deceptive self-centered ego. In any case, all human dignity goes back to its original fountainhead which is none other than the Divine Spirit. Forgetfulness of one's Divine origin and submersion in the carnal self and the illusory ego is cause enough for the repudiation of such dignity.

### **Man, the Epiphany of All the Divine Names**

b- Another conspicuous feature of man which makes him unique among all creatures is that he is the epiphany and manifestation of all the Divine Names and Attributes. Whereas all other beings including angels are the manifestation of particular Divine Names by which they manifest, know, worship and adore God, it is man alone, that is to say, the perfect man or the perfect saint, who is the manifestation of all Divine Names. «And He taught man all the Names.» (Quran, 2:31) It is man alone who manifests, realizes, knows and glorifies God through His Names «To God belong the Most Beautiful Names; so

call Him by them and leave the company of those who blaspheme His Names» (7:180). In other words man alone among all other beings is the «image of God» and this alone is the source and cause of his dignity.

Now the Divine Names are classified into the Names of Beauty (اسماءالجمال) and the Names of Majesty (اسماءالجلال) whose relationship to human dignity is evident. Among Divine Names, moreover, certain are specifically related to the dignity of man among which one can mention the Name Karīm, that is, the author of dignity and nobility.

### Man, the Vicegerent of God

c. Among the epithets attributed to man in the Holy Quran one can mention (خليفةالله في ارضه) variously translated as the vicegerent, the deputy, the pontiff of God on earth. This means that whatever a Muslim believer does, he does it vicariously on the part of God as a deputy. A deputy should first have the qualities of him whom he deputizes and also of those over whom he is deputized, otherwise he would not be a real deputy. Hence man, according to the Muslim sages, should partake of the qualities of God (of whom he is a vicegerent or a deputy) and those of the creatures (over whom he is deputized). Hence man as *vicare Dei* or deputy of God is given dominion and sovereignty over His creatures.

To sum up, in the Islamic context all honor and dignity has God as its true author and rests in establishing one's bond with Him (which is the literal meaning of the word religion) «We have honored the children of Adam and carried them on land and sea». (Quran, 17:70)

### Man, Created by the Two Hands of God

One of the distinctive features of man in contrast to other creatures as mentioned in the Holy Quran is that he was made by the two hands of God. God addressing Satan says: «What prevented you from prostrating before that which I created by My two hands?» (Quran, 38:75-76) Considering that God does not have physical hands, exegetes and commentators have resorted to all kinds of esoteric interpretations. According to some, the two hands refer to the

Attributes of Beauty (Sifāt-i-Jamāl) and the Attributes of Majesty (Safāt-i-Jalāl), hence man, being the image of God, virtually personifies in his being all the attributes of Beauty and Majesty or all the Divine perfections.

Other commentators, such as Ibn ‘Arabi, take this verse to mean the giving and the receiving or the active and the passive Attributes of God. Reference is made in the Quran to the fact that God receives the loans of His servants and accepts their repentance. According to the these commentators, every agent requiring a patient which is the receptacle of the act, God manifesting all His perfect Attributes in the Reality of man, demands that the human receptacle be all-inclusive and comprehensive enough to accept the totality of Divine Attributes. This goes again to corroborate the fact that man is the most perfect among creatures both with regard to his active and passive nature.

### **The Primordial Nature of Man**

Islam considers man as such, that is, not as a fallen being who has committed an original sin and needs to be saved by a miraculous Divine intervention, but as a being who has a primordial Divine nature. According to the teachings of the Quran, man, like all other creatures in Heaven or on the earth, has been created in accordance with this unchanging primordial Nature. Adam no doubt sinned, and this act of sin was tantamount to revoking his covenant with God, but here again, when Adam disobeyed God, God manifested his mercy and grace through the act of revelation. God taught man the words of repentance and by His infinite mercy, goodness and forgiveness restored him to his primordial nature. «Thereafter, Adam received certain words from his Lord and He turned towards him.» (Qur'an 2:37) Sin therefore is not an irremediable state for man. He can be restored to his pure nature through repentance and Divine forgiveness.

### **Man's Proximity to God**

Another aspect of human dignity in the Islamic context rests in one's proximity to God. According to the Quran, every religion is the vehicle through which this proximity is realized. The highest in rank and dignity according to the Quran are prophets who vary in spiritual

rank from messengers who again are either the founders of great religions such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad or are deliverers of special Divine messages to humankind. All of them have been the receptacles of special revelations and have been directly addressed by God in an ineffable spiritual encounter. Next in rank is the hierarchy of the Friends of God (*'awliyā'*), the veracious (*siddīqīn*), the just, the martyrs, the righteous and the virtuous, the godfearing, and so on.

### Question 2: What is the special dignity of the human being?

The special dignity of man rests in his fulfillment of his privileged vocation as man. Man is distinguished from other creatures by his Divine intelligence which is the greatest gift bestowed on him. Now the sole function and the *sine qua non* privilege of the Divine intellect is to know the truth of the Absolute, or the Absolute Truth, otherwise the human intellect would be nothing. All revelations are destined to guide the human intellect toward the attainment of that truth. Now, the highest science in Islam is the science of the Divine Unity (*Tawhīd*). The greatest metaphysical errors in Islam are *Kufr*, or the denial of the Absolute and hence the knowledge of the Absolute, and *Shirk* (partnership) which means to make a partner with the Absolute, by believing in two or more absolutes, or by absolutizing that which is by nature relative or by relativizing what is by nature absolute. «God forgives not that any partner be associated with Him. Other than that He forgives to whomsoever He will. Whosoever associates aught with God, surely, he has gone far astray into deep error» (Quran, 4:48).

The second gift of God to human beings is that of free-will or choice, which is one of the greatest boons and blessings endowed upon man. Freedom of the will in the absolute sense belongs to God, and it also belongs to man as the *Vicare Dei*. But in the religious context the free-will, having primarily God and fellow-human beings as its object, best manifests itself in love of God and love of the neighbor, the love of one's fellow human beings in God. The Prophet (PH) said: «a believer is the mirror of his fellow believer» meaning

that both are the reflections of the Divinity and as if see each other through the mirror of the Divinity. This love of God and his creatures manifests itself in faith, hope and charity (*īthār*).

The third constituent of Islam is doing pious and righteous deeds or one could say practicing virtues. As in other religions the practice of virtues is much emphasized in Islam. According to the Holy Quran, faith in God (or a supreme being), faith in the afterlife and doing good and pious works are the necessary conditions for salvation in all religions. The devotees of different religions are commanded to surpass each other in virtuous acts: «To thee we have revealed the scripture in truth, confirming the scriptures that came before it and vouchsafing them. So judge between them by what God has revealed and do not follow their vain caprices, lest thou diverge from the truth that has come to thee. For each we have appointed a Divine Law and a clear way. If God had willed he would have made you a single community. But he wants to try you in what has come to you. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God shall you all return and He will tell you of that in which you differed.» (Quran, 5:48)

Many verses of the Quran are addressed, not to Muslims or believers of other religions, but to humanity at large. «O mankind, we have created you male and female and made you into races (nations) and tribes. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing (righteous, pious, virtuous) of you. God is All-knowing, All-aware». (Quran, 13:49)

It is clear that the dignity of man rests above all on his realization of virtues and his practice of righteous and pious deeds. Contrapositively stated, man is not entitled, in the religious context, to choose evil and vice.

### **Question 3: What are the scriptural foundations of this special dignity?**

One could say that the whole of the scriptures is the narration of the dignity of man, if for no other reason than that they were spoken to

or revealed to man by the Divinity. In this paper we can only refer to some of the verses in the Holy Quran pointing to the human dignity.

**Man's spirit as the Spirit of God, Prophets and messengers as the recipients of the Holy Spirit.**

1- «And we gave Jesus, son of Mary the clear signs and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit.» (Quran, 2:253).

2- «The Holy Spirit sent it down from thy Lord in truth, to confirm those who believe and to be a guidance and good tidings to those who surrender.» (Quran, 16:104)

3- «He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command upon whomsoever he will of his servants.» (Quran, 16:2)

4- «Truly it is the revelation of the Lord of all Being, brought down by the faithful spirit upon thy heart that thou mayest be one of the warners.» (Quran, 26:193)

5- «And Mary ... who guarded her virginity we breathed into her of our Spirit...» (Quran, 66:12)

6- «And he originated the creation of man out of clay ... then he shaped him and breathed into him of His own spirit, and He appointed for you hearing and sight and hearts; little thanks you show.» (Quran, 32:9)

7- «And when thy Lord said to the angels: see, I am creating a mortal of a clay of mud moulded. When I have shaped him and breathed my spirit in him fall you down in prostration before him.» (Quran, 15:29)

**God taught Adam all the Names**

1- «And He taught Adam all the names, all of them; then He presented them unto the angels and said, 'Now tell Me about these names if you speak truly'. They said, 'Glory be to thee. We know not save what thou hast taught us surely thou art the All-knowing, the All-wise.» (Quran, 2:30)



### **Angels are bidden to bow down before Adam**

«And when we said to the angels, 'Bow yourselves to Adam, so they bowed themselves save the Devil; he refused and waxed proud and so became one of the unbelievers.» (Quran, 2:34)

### **Man as the vicegerent of God**

1-«And when thy Lord said to the angels, 'I am setting in the earth a vicegerent'. They said, 'What, wilt thou set therein one who will do corruption there and shed blood, while we proclaim thy praise and glorify thee'? He said, 'Assuredly I know what you know not.» (Quran, 2:30)

2- «O David, behold, we have appointed thee a vicegerent on earth; therefore judge between men justly, and follow not caprice, lest it lead thee astray from the way of God.» (Quran, 26:38)

3- «And remember when he appointed you as successors after the people of Noah, and increased you in stature broadly; remember God's bounties, haply you will prosper.» (Quran, 7:69)

4- «Is not He who answereth those in distress when they cry unto Him and removeth the evil and hath He not made you vicegerents on earth.» (Quran, 27:62)

5- «It is He who has appointed you vicegerents on earth and has raised some of you in rank above others, that He may try you in what He has given you ...» (Quran, 6:165)

6- «Then we appointed you vicegerents on earth after them, that we might behold how you would fare.» (Quran, 10:14)

### **The creation of man betokening his dignity**

1- «O Mankind, fear your Lord who created you of a single soul and from it created its mate and from the pair of them He propagated many men and women;

And fear God concerning whom ye shall be asked and the wombs; Surely God ever watches over you.» (Quran, 4:1)

2- «It is He who created you out of one living soul and made of him his spouse that he might take rest in her.» (Quran, 7:188)

3. «We created man of an extraction of clay, then we set him, as a sperm, in a secure place of rest, then we made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood, then we created the clot a tissue, then we created of the tissues bones, then we clothed the bones in flesh, then we produced out of it another creature. So blessed be God the best of all creators.» (Quran, 23:12)

4- «And He originated the creation of man out of clay, then He fashioned his progeny of an extract of despicable water; then He shaped him and breathed into him of this own spirit, then He appointed for you hearing and sight and hearts; little thankful you are!» (Quran, 32:7)

5- «What! Does man reckon he shall be left in vain? Was he not a sperm-drop spilled?» (Quran, 75:36)

6- «O Man! What lured you away from your most Bountiful Lord, Who created you and shaped you and made you in perfect symmetry and formed you into whatever form he wished.» (Quran, 82:7)

7- «We have honored the children of Adam and carried them on land and sea and provided them with good sustenance and favored them greatly over many of those we created?» (Quran, 17:70)

#### **Man's primordial covenant with God**

«And (remember) when thy Lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins, their seed and made them testify unto themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yea, verily we testify.'» (Quran, 7:171)

**Pious, righteous and good deeds and virtues as necessary conditions for human dignity**

1- «That is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the godfearing, who believe in the unseen and perform the prayer and expend of what We have provided them, who believe in what has been sent down to thee and what has been sent down before thee and have faith in the Hereafter. Those are upon guidance from the Lord, those are the ones who will be saved» (Quran, 2:3).

2- «It is not piety that you turn your faces to the East and to the West. True piety is this: to believe in God, and the Last Day, the angels, the Book and the Prophets, to give of one's substance, out of love for Him, to kinsmen and orphans, the needy, the traveler, the beggars, and to ransom the slaves, to perform the prayer, to pay the alms. And they who fulfill their covenant and endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship and peril, these are they who are true in their faith, these are the truly godfearing.» (Quran, 25:177)

3- «And take provision for your journey! And the best provision is godfearing. So fear me O you people of understanding.» (Quran, 2:197)

4- «And vie with one another hastening to forgiveness from your Lord and to a garden whose breadth is as the heavens and earth prepared for the godfearing, who expend in prosperity and adversity in almsgiving and restrain their rage and pardon the offences of their fellowmen; and God loves the good-doers; who when they commit an indecency or wrong themselves, remember God, and pray forgiveness for their sins – and who shall forgive sins but God? And do not persevere in the wrongs they did and that wittingly. Those, their recompense is forgiveness from their Lord and gardens beneath which rivers flow, therein dwelling forever.» (Quran, 3:133)

5- «And surely we shall try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to those who endure with patience; who say when a misfortune befalls them: 'Lo we are Allah's and unto Him we shall return.' They are the ones upon whom shall be the blessings of their Lord and His mercy, and they are the rightly guided.» (Quran, 2:155)

6- «You shall certainly be tried in your possessions and in your persons and you shall hear much wrong from those who were given scriptures before you and from the idolaters. But if you persevere and are godfearing that will determine the issue.» (Quran, 3:186)

7- « (Those) who fulfill God's covenant and break not the compact, who join what God has commanded and fear their Lord and dread the Day of Reckoning, patient men, desirous of the Face of their Lord, who perform their prayer, and expend of that we have provided them, secretly and in public and avert evil with good- theirs shall be the Eternal Abode.» (Quran, 13:21)

8- «Men and women Muslims, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, enduring men (in the way of God) and enduring women, humble men and humble women, men and women who give in charity, men who fast and women who fast, men and women who guard their privy parts, men and women who remember God oft- for them God has prepared forgiveness and a mighty wage.» (Quran, 33:35)

9- «It is not your wealth, nor your children that shall bring you nigh unto Us, except for him who believes and does righteous deeds ...» (Quran, 34:37)

10- «Prosperous are the believers, who in their prayers are humble, and who turn away from any idle talk, and who are active at giving alms, and guard their private parts, save from their spouses and what their right

hands own, then they are not blame-worthy; ... and those who observe their trusts, and their covenant, and who are watchful of their prayers; they are inheritors, who shall inherit paradise, therein dwelling forever.» (Quran, 23:1-10)

11- «I have been commanded to judge justly among you. God is our Lord and your Lord.» (Quran, 42:15)

12- «O believers, be you securers of justice, witnesses for God. Let not detestation for a people move you not to be equitable; be equitable- that is nearer to godfearing. And fear God; surely God is aware of the things you do.» (Quran, 5:8)

13- «And when you speak, be just even if it should be to a near kinsman. And fulfill God's covenant.» (Quran, 6:152)

#### **That Evil-doers are not on a Par with the Virtuous**

1- «What? Is he who has been a believer like unto him who has been ungodly? They are not equal.» (Quran, 32:18)

2- «Is the one who seeks the satisfaction of God like the one who draws on himself the wrath of God?» (Quran, 3:162)

3- «Or shall we make those who believe and do righteous deeds as the workers of corruption on earth, or shall We make the godfearing as the evil-doers?» (Quran, 38:28)

4- «Not equal are the blind and the seeing man, those who believe and do deeds of righteousness and the wrongdoers. Little do you reflect.» (Quran, 40:58)

5- «What! Do those who commit evil deeds think that we shall hold them equal to those who believe and do righteous deeds? That equal shall be their life and their death? What an ill judgment they make.» (Quran, 45:21)

**That a believer should prefer the other world to this world**

1- «Short is the enjoyment of this world. The hereafter is better for the pious.» (Quran, 4:47)

2- «Are you so content with this present life, rather than the world to come? Yet the enjoyment of this present life, compared with the world to come, is but a little thing.» (Quran, 9:38)

3- «The present life is naught but a sport and a diversion; surely the Last Abode is better for those that are godfearing!» (Quran, 6:32)

4- «We have appointed all that is on the earth an embellishment for it, that we may try which of them is better in good deeds.» (Quran, 18:7)

5- «Wealth and children are the adornments of this world: But good things that abide and good deeds are best in the sight of thy Lord.» (Quran, 18:46)

6- «But seek amidst that which God has given thee, the Last Abode, and forget not thy portion of the present world; and do good as God has been good to thee. And seek not to do corruption in the earth; Surely God loves not the workers of corruption» (Quran, 28:77).

7- «No indeed, but you love this fleeting world and leave the Hereafter» (Quran, 75:20).

8- «Prosperous is he who has cleansed himself and invokes the Name of his Lord and prays. Nay, but you prefer the present life; and the world to come is better and more enduring» (Quran, 87:16).

**Question 4: What scripturally based obligations arise for others to respect that dignity?**

From what we have said it is evident that humans get all their dignity from God, whether they know it or not. Thus the more a human becomes like unto God, the more honorable, dignified and

worthy of respect he or she is. The more a person becomes aware of the Divine Origin of his spirit and the more he realizes in his being the Divine Names and Attributes and the more he establishes the bond of friendship (*walāyah*) with God, the more honorable and dignified he becomes.

Unbelievers, on the other hand, have deprived themselves of such dignity because they have denied their Divine Origin which is the source of all dignity. So they are as if deaf and blind. They have hearts which do not understand and eyes that do not see and ears which do not hear and are deaf to truth.

From the Islamic perspective, the world has been created for man, but man has been created for God. In a sacred tradition transmitted from the Holy Prophet, God, addressing the Prophet David says: «O David, I have created the world (or all beings) for you, but I have created you for Myself.» In another prophetic tradition, God, addressing His believing servants, says: «All My heavens and My earth cannot contain me, but the heart of My believing servant can contain Me.» Yes, the heart of a believer can encompass the truly Infinite God which no other being can. Perhaps the same is signified by the following Quranic verse: «Verily We offered our trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains and they refused to accept it and man alone accepted the trust.» (Quran, 33:72)

So it is expected of man that he make his transactions with God, and not to barter himself cheaply in exchange for the vanities of the world at the expense of God, which would be below his dignity.

One should moreover practice virtues and shun the vices. One of the great articles of faith in Islam which is incumbent on every Muslim is the so-called «bidding the good and forbidding evil.» That is, every Muslim is expected to prevent any vice, evil and corruption by using his hand or his tongue, or at least at heart. It is reported that the Holy prophet said that if you are on board a ship at deep sea and suddenly one started to bore a hole in it would you keep silent? They said no because in that case the ship would sink and drown in the sea. Then the prophet said that such would be the case, if grave sins and abominable vices took place and seeing them you kept silent.

Cardinal sins from the religious point of view are the greatest threats to human dignity. Take the case of murder which is inimical to the very existence of human beings, or take fornication which is to use other human beings as means for gratifying one's carnal passions. Such is the case with other grave or venial sins.

One could safely say that in Islam other than the cardinal sins, all kinds of transgression or misdemeanors which in any way menace or jeopardize human dignity are absolutely prohibited. One can name among the many other things mentioned in the Quran, lying, backbiting, slander, harm and damage of any kind done to oneself or others, treachery, perfidy, boastfulness and pride, hypocrisy, extravagance, suspiciousness and evil opinion, excessive and unnecessary inquisitiveness, giving false testimony, humiliation, derision and ridicule, fault-finding, calling names, foolish talk, falsehood of any kind, injustice, trickery, hard-heartedness, intemperance, lasciviousness, disequilibrium, despair of God's mercy, apostasy, enmity, being grudging, jealousy, corruption of any kind, breaking one's promise, revoking pacts unduly, blind imitation, transgressing the rights of orphans, widows, the needy and the poor, eating unlawful food and hoarding unlawful wealth, transgressing rights of any kind, enslavement, niggardliness, disobedience and disrespect to parents and elders, ill-treatment of neighbors and kinsmen, proscribing the good and prescribing evil, incontinence and many other things of the kind.

One could generally say that all the commandments and prescriptions in the Holy Quran are aimed at the human dignity as an end and all prohibitions ultimately lead to human indignity. The golden rule in Islam as in other religions is «Always do unto others what you would expect them to do unto you.»

**Question 5: How do the concepts of «human dignity» and «Human rights» differ?**

Islam is never opposed or indifferent to human rights in so far as they do not conflict with man's Divine rights and in so far as they are



taken into consideration within the total context of Islam. Such concepts as equality and liberty and the like take on much deeper significance within the Islamic network of values. Justice is considered to be of paramount importance, including within itself many other values and rights. «I have been commanded to establish justice among you.» (Quran, 42:15) Considering that justice can never be established without total knowledge and wisdom (God for example is the Just, because He is All-wise), Justice can only be truly established within a context such as Islam which is based on knowledge of the Divine scheme of things and in which the intellection of the primordial nature of things is emphasized.

On the other hand to take some values out of their total context and to underpin their relevance at the expense of perhaps some more basic values might lead to «the fallacy of the context». To kill a person with the pretext of making him free, for example, is to expose oneself to committing such a fallacy and would be to dispose of the child with the tub.

#### **Question 6: What do the scriptures teach us about the main threats to human dignity?**

Ignorance of man's Divine vocation, forgetfulness of one's Divine Origin, egoism and selfish love, at the expense of the love of the neighbor and love of fellow-human beings, the pursuit of individual or communal self-interest, injustice and oppression, transgression of any kind, vice of every sort and category, evil intention, inattention to the welfare of other human beings, to think oneself better than others and maldemeanors, some of them referred to in Question 4, are some of the things which threaten the human dignity.

#### **Notes:**

1. Sanskrit, meaning literally 'without qualities'
2. Sanskrit, meaning literally 'with qualities'